

Writing an Effective Résumé: The Basics

Your résumé is your chance to display your qualifications, skills, and ambitions. It is a record of your goals and successes, and a way of communicating your capabilities to a potential employer. The résumé conveys to others what you already know, namely that you are a competent, distinctive, and enthusiastic candidate for the position.

Even so, because most employers receive heaps of applications for every open position, your résumé has to do more than showcase your credentials. In order to be effective, your résumé must do the following:

- Show that you are qualified for the job
- Incorporate keywords and terminology from the field
- Highlight your strengths even if the reader only has time to skim it
- Offer details about your experience to a reader who is looking for them
- Present the strongest possible version or image of you

Types of Résumés

There are two main kinds of résumés. The **chronological résumé**, which emphasizes job titles and dates, is a more traditional format, while the **skills résumé** is built around what you did, not when you did it.

The main difference between them is how you organize your work history. In a **chronological résumé**, list job titles and dates in reverse chronology (most recent/current job first). Include title, organization, city, state, dates, and other details describing your duties. When writing a **skills résumé**, choose headings to highlight strengths, using terms from the field. Combine activities from classes, paid jobs, and volunteer work. Then, create a separate section – “Employment History” — in which you provide a less detailed reverse chronology of paid jobs.

It’s best to let the situation (your work history and the nature of your desired position) determine what format you employ. You may decide to develop both a chronological and a skills résumé for your job hunt. Additionally, you should prepare one résumé for each *type* of job.

What to Include

Here’s a list of the common categories for résumé information. You may add to or subtract from this list as necessary, but those marked with an asterisk (*) are essential and should appear on every résumé.



Contact information*
 Career objective
 Summary of qualifications
 Education*
 Experience*
 Honors
 Activities
 References

Contact Information

Include your name, address, phone number, e-mail address. If you have a professional website, include the URL. It's often a good idea to make your name and contact information a bit larger (but not too big!) than the rest of the text in the document. Make sure that your e-mail address is professional.

Career Objective

If you decide to include a Career Objective, it's a good idea to customize it with the name of the company to which you are applying. A Career Objective can be helpful if the job for which you're applying doesn't seem to relate clearly to your education or previous work experience. You may also want to include a Career Objective if your school or department provides employers with résumés from a number of students with different majors.

Summary of Qualifications

This is an optional category in which you can summarize your achievements, knowledge, skills, and abilities. Generally, this will take the form of a bulleted list (containing 3-7 items) that contains specific information. Use the terminology of your desired field.

Education

Depending on the position you are seeking, the relative importance of your degree to your chosen field, and the extent of your other qualifications, this category can appear before or after your work experience.

List your education in reverse chronology and provide the following information:

Degree, major, month and year received, university, city, state

It is optional to provide the following information: focus area or major; GPA (overall, in major, last term, etc.); information on thesis or senior project; courses related to major; courses/hours in areas of emphasis.

Experience

For most employers, this will be the heart of your résumé. If you are writing a chronological résumé, describe your work history in a reverse chronology, including relevant information like job titles, dates, organization, city, state, and details about your responsibilities and accomplishments. If you are writing a skills résumé, mine your work history for the list of skills you will provide under relevant headings (and don't forget to create another heading for "Work Experience.")

Activities

Your extracurricular or non-work activities make you a unique candidate. In this optional section of your résumé, list your participation in student organizations, civic groups, professional societies, and sports.

Honors and Awards

Recognition from another group or organization can suggest to your employer that you are worthy of their recognition as well. This optional category is the place to list scholarships, academic honor societies, listings in recognition books, awards from professional or civic groups, and accomplishments in sports.

References

If you have decided to include references on your résumé, it's important to do it thoughtfully. List 3-6 supervisors, instructors, or advisors who have seen you in leadership roles. Include the following information for each: name, job title, organization, business phone, and e-mail address.